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Factors explaining social resilience against COVID-19: the case of Spain

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ABSTRACT
Between March and May, Spain was one of the hardest-hit European countries by the COVID-19 pandemic and registered one of the highest death rates in the world. Among other measures, the political response was a lockdown of more than three months that was applied by means of six fifteen-day extensions. The Spanish Sociological Research Centre (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas; CIS, in its Spanish acronym) carried out a survey in early June (n = 4,258) asking respondents about their rating of the response to the situation and their ability to cope with further extensions of the state of emergency. The concept of resilience is key to understanding this situation and the population's ability to face up to it. This paper analyses factors that help bolster resilience, which include confidence in the political leader and in the perception or rating of the measures adopted. The conclusion highlights the importance of political communication, both of leadership and of political measures, in fostering social resilience.

Introduction: the Spanish context and resilience against COVID-19

The Spanish government declared a state of emergency in its extraordinary sitting on Saturday, 14 March 2020 in response to the growing number of COVID-19 cases in the 2020 pandemic (Fernández Riquelme 2020). The main emergency measure of this decision was the enforcement of a nationwide lockdown to reduce infection rates, which came into effect at midnight on Sunday.

The Spanish president, Pedro Sánchez, proposed to regional presidents a sixth and final extension of the state of emergency from 7 to 21 June. In

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total, the lockdown lasted ninety-eight days, or three months and six days (EFE 2020). Part of the Spanish population had difficulty complying with the measures of said lockdown, with around one million, two hundred thousand people being fined and a further nine thousand arrested due to breaking the lockdown rules and the measures contained in Royal Decree 463/2020 (BOE, 2020).

These figures show that not everyone is capable of responding appropriately in a crisis, catastrophe, etc. In the field of social sciences, resilience is a recurring construct in the analysis of success in difficult situations or contexts. It is a concept for which there is no universally accepted definition (Brewer *et al.* 2019; Sandín-Esteban and Sánchez-Martí 2015), although there is a certain consensus in considering it as an effective mechanism for overcoming adverse situations (Fergus and Zimmerman 2005; McGinnis 2018; Ramón *et al.* 2019).

The fact that resilience is considered a dynamic category opens up a series of theoretical debates about whether resilience itself is a process or a result, about whether internal or external factors are the most relevant to the individual, etc. (Sandín-Esteban and Sánchez-Martí 2015). There has also been discussion about whether to distinguish between resilience and coping. For Frydenberg (2017), the former is an 'optimistic' capacity or quality and the latter refers to 'measurable' strategies or resources, while for Keck and Sakdapolrak (2013), coping strategies and adaptive capacities are part of social resilience. Meanwhile, Thorén and Olsson (2017) open up another field of debate on the question of the content of the resilience concept by suggesting its normative nature as beyond descriptive approaches which, applied to social systems, mask ratings.

In addition, the concept of resilience is related to other categories with a long-founded theoretical tradition, such as social capital (Aldrich 2017; Lee 2019). According to González-Muzzio (2013), a traumatic event is followed by emergent behaviours which mobilise group resources to confront, as far as possible, the new situation. Resilience is also linked to optimism, satisfaction with one's life and perceived well-being (Cazalla-Luna and Molero 2016; Denovan and Macaskill 2017). Likewise, most research underlines the importance of resilience for emotional balance and social success (Cachón *et al.* 2020; Sandín-Esteban and Sánchez-Martí 2015; Sandoval-Hernandez and Cortes 2012; Tomás-Miquel *et al.* 2016). Recently, there have been studies into the effect of social media on individual and community responses or behaviours to act in a resilient way (Brewer *et al.* 2019; Lozano-Díaz *et al.* 2020).

Other authors highlight the links between resilience and social and political trust, although they acknowledge that this issue has not been widely studied (Helliwell *et al.* 2018). The successful response of the community to various disasters is connected to social confidence among its members, as has occurred in events such as earthquakes, hurricanes or tsunamis (Elliott *et al.* 2010; González-Muzzio 2013). Higher levels of social confidence and cooperation have, in some cases, led to higher levels of happiness, even prior to the traumatic event. Meanwhile, political confidence has declined in the United States since the 1960s, whereas in European countries it is experiencing a disparate or heterogeneous situation. Research shows that it is decreasing in southern European countries most affected by the crisis, but increasing in richer northern European countries (Listhaug and Jakobsen 2018; Marien 2011). In any event, the study of the relationship between political confidence and social resilience in crisis contexts is now of particular interest, in Europe and the world.

Recent empirical research has shown significant relationships between resilience and the ability to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic generated (Giovannini *et al.* 2020), for example in the field of healthcare (Bryce *et al.* 2020), in the psychological and social context of everyday life (Arrossi *et al.* 2020), in the university or educational community (Cleland *et al.* 2020). Upon this background, the aim of this article is to discover the factors which would allow the Spanish population to positively cope with or tolerate a prolongation of the state of emergency and lockdown.

Method: design, sample, instruments and data analysis

The Spanish Sociological Research Centre (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas; CIS, in its Spanish acronym) is an autonomous body governed by the Cabinet Office. The main function entrusted to the CIS is to foster the scientific knowledge of Spanish society by conducting monthly surveys or audits which help further knowledge among Spanish society and sociological trends over the course of time (Torres 2003). We used one of the latest surveys in order to analyse current Spaniards` attitudes and opinions on pandemic crisis and main political issues.

The June 2020 survey contains questions related to the pandemic and is available in the database (CIS 2020). The technical file of this survey could be summarised schematically: the scope included Spanish people of both sexes aged 18 years and over; the sample size was 4,258 interviews; and the sample was selected randomly between landlines and mobile phones with

a percentage of 55.4% and 44.6%, respectively. However, individuals were selected through the application of sex and age quotas, with the assumed sampling error being ±1.5% for the entire sample for a confidence level of 95.5% (two-sigma) and $P = Q$. The fieldwork was carried out between 1 and 9 June 2020. The corresponding data is a representative sample according to sex and age quotas and, as well, by strata municipality sizes and the 17 Autonomous Communities of Spain.?

The dependent variable considers the respondents' resilience or coping ability given further lockdown extensions. The literal wording of the question was: 'Regarding the lockdown, would you be able to continue coping with self-isolation at home given further extensions to the state of emergency?:

- Yes, I would have no problem with further extensions
- Yes, but only with the lifting of certain measures (going for a walk, doing sport, etc.)
- No, but if further extensions are approved, I would have to tolerate them
- No, I would not cope with a further extension'

This dependent variable has been analysed in two ways, firstly descriptively with a set of socio-demographic variables (sex, age groups, habitat, educational level, ideology and religiosity). Secondly, the explanatory factors of the dichotomised dependent variable (0 = 'I would not cope with further extensions to lockdown' and 1 = 'Yes, I would cope') have been studied by logistic regression analysis. The set of factors or independent variables that formed part of the model logistic regression were, on one hand, six sociodemographic questions:, sex, age, habitat (from 1 = 'less than 2,000 inhabitants' to 7 = 'more than 1 million of inhabitants'); educational level (from 1 = 'no education' to 6 = 'higher'); subjective social class (from 1 = 'high' to 5 = 'low'); political leaning (from 1="left-wing' to 10 = 'right-wing'). And on the other hand, five opinion questions in Likert format (from 1 = 'not at all' to 5 = 'very') on political trust and assessment of the pandemic crisis.

Results

Table 1 presents a descriptive analysis of the dependent variable according to some of the most significant sociodemographic variables. This gives a profile of the people who are initially more resilient or more willing to

Table 1. Descriptive analysis of the resilience to continue lockdown by using socio-demographic variables.

	Yes, I would have no problem	Yes, with de-escalation measures	No, I would have to resign	No, I would not stand	Mean (1–4)	S.D.
SEX						
Men	39.9%	33.8%	16.5%	**9.9%**	1.96	0.98
Women	**43.1%**	35.1%	14.9%	6.9%	1.86	0.91
AGE GROUPS						
18–35	32.6%	46.8%	14.8%	5.8%	1.94	0.84
36–60	39.1%	34.8%	16.4%	**9.6%**	1.97	0.97
Over 60 years old	**51.9%**	24.9%	15.1%	8.1%	1.79	0.98
HABITAT SIZE						
Less than 10.000	**46.7%**	31.8%	14.9%	6.6%	1.81	0.92
10.000–100.000	42.6%	33.5%	14.7%	**9.2%**	1.90	0.97
More than 100.000	37.8%	36.8%	17.0%	8.4%	1.96	0.94
LEVEL OF EDUCATION						
Primary	**58.3%**	22.6%	13.5%	5.6%	1.67	0.91
Secondary	42.7%	33.1%	15.9%	8.3%	1.90	0.95
Higher	34.6%	40.3%	15.8%	**9.3%**	2.00	0.94
SOCIAL CLASS						
High	35.0%	38.6%	15.9%	**10.6%**	2.03	0.97
Middle	38.6%	36.2%	16.7%	8.4%	1.95	0.94
Low	**45.7%**	32.1%	14.1%	8.1%	1.85	0.95
POLITICAL LEANING						
Left-wing	**48.8%**	38.2%	10.2%	2.8%	1.67	0.77
Centre	38.1%	35.5%	17.8%	8.6%	1.97	0.95
Right-wing	34.4%	25.0%	19.5%	**21.1%**	2.28	1.15
RELIGIOSITY						
Practitioner	**48.9%**	23.2%	17.4%	**10.6%**	1.90	1.04
Believer	39.4%	35.2%	16.6%	8.8%	1.95	0.95
Not believer	40.0%	39.6%	13.6%	6.7%	1.87	0.89
TOTAL	41.5%	34.5%	15.7%	8.3%	1.91	0.95
TOTAL (dichotomized)	76,0%	24,0%				

Source: Own preparation based on CIS database.

cope with further extensions or the prolongation of the state of emergency and lockdown. If we look at the average, the profile of the most resilient person is a woman over 60 years old, living in a town of less than 10,000 inhabitants, with a primary level of education, low social class, left-wing political leanings and no religious beliefs. Meanwhile, the profile of the least resilient person is a male between 36 and 60 years old, living in a city with more than 100,000 inhabitants, with higher education studies, high social class, right-wing political leanings and religious beliefs.

The political leaning variable is interesting, as it is where the most extreme or polarised options are found. Just over forty percent (40.6%) of people with right-wing political leanings would not cope with an extension of the lockdown, while close to ninety percent (87%) of respondents with left-wing leanings would be able to cope with further extensions to

the lockdown. Overall, three out of every four Spaniards would cope with self-isolation at home with further extensions to the state of emergency, when responses 1 and 2 are added together.

Table 2 shows the result of the logistic regression analysis between the dichotomised dependent variable given the scarce variability found in the descriptive analysis and the doubtful ordinal character of the variable with a set of eleven independent factors or variables available in the survey that revolve around three sections. First of all, six factors or sociodemographic issues (sex, age, place of residence, education, subjective social class and political leaning); then the second section with three questions related to political confidence and the measures enforced (in the president of the central government, in the leader of the opposition and in the rating of the measures adopted by the government); and, finally, two questions related to the rating of the COVID-19 situation (degree of concern and rating of the future economic consequences of the pandemic).

The variables related to the political trust in the government's leader and the valuation of its measures adopted against the pandemic are statistically significant (B = .525, $p < .001$; B = .285, $p < .001$, respectively) in the logistic regression analyses. They are also the factors that have the largest effect on dependent variable according to their average marginal

Table 2. Logistic regression analyses between the dichotomized dependent variable and factors.

	B	SE	p	OR	dy/dx (AME)
Sex (1 = women)	.203	.085	.016*	1.226	.0222
Age	−.004	.003	.178	.996	−.0007
Habitat size	−.024	.025	.334	.976	−.0042
Level of education	−.068	.034	.046*	.934	−.0090
Social class	.001	.046	.983	1.001	.0001
Political leaning	−.093	.028	.001**	.911	−.0084
Degree of Confidence in the leader of the central government	.525	.056	.000***	1.690	.0912
Degree of Confidence in the leader of the main opposition party	−.209	.063	.001**	.811	−.0383
Rating of the measures adopted by the government against COVID-19	.285	.044	.000***	1.329	.0484
Degree of concern about the pandemic COVID-19[5]	.139	.060	.022*	1.149	.0083
Rating of the future economic and labor consequences of the pandemic COVID-19	.008	.083	.927	1.008	.0169
(Constant)	3.981	.478	.000***	53.562	
n (cases included in analysis)	3534				
Log pseudo-likelihood	3492.60				
Cragg and Uhler's R^2	0.15				

Source: Own preparation based on CIS database.
Notes: Entries are estimates (B) from logistic regressions with robust standard errors (SE); p: level of significance and odds ratios (OR). *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

effects (AMEs) compared to the rest of the variables measured with the Likert scale. In other words, the greater confidence in the leader of the central government and in the political measures against COVID-19, as well as political leanings further to the left, increase the probability of responding affirmatively to coping with a longer lockdown. However, in the case of the greatest confidence in the leader of the main opposition party, the unstandardised beta (regression coefficient) is negative ($B = -.209$, $p < .01$) is interpreted to the contrary. This result shows the situation of polarisation and political tension, especially as the main opposition party (Partido Popular – People's Party) voted against the final two extensions to the lockdown in May and June.

The sociodemographic variables or factors of sex and level of education are also statistically significant, along with the degree of concern about the situation of the COVID-19 coronavirus. Meanwhile, the size of the place of residence or 'habitat', subjective 'social class' and the 'Rating of the future economic and labour consequences of the pandemic COVID-1' factors do not achieve conventional levels of statistical significance.

Conclusions and discussion

The most important conclusion to this study is the relevance of the level of confidence in political leadership and in the measures adopted to respond with resilience to political measures, such as lockdown in the current pandemic. This research may well have many limitations, so ad hoc instruments or surveys would be required for a more accurate measure of resilience, confidence and political leadership, as well as a more detailed data analysis to pinpoint certain statistical effects. Therefore, it remains open to discussion whether the affirmative answer to the dependent variable question denotes resilience, mere compliance with the norm, resignation, a coping strategy, social desirability, etc. In addition, certain results such as the greater resilience of women contrast with other studies where men are the most resilient (Tomyn and Weinberg 2018; Vizoso 2019). Could be most likely that the older age of women compared to men, the fact that the pandemic affects the elderly more, women's concern for health and care, etc. may be intervening or explaining factors in this uniqueness. While the option of right-wing leanings being the least resilient may be conditioned by the reaction against the current left-wing government and other contextual variables, etc. (Molina *et al.* 2020).

In any event, this exploratory research paper highlights the importance of confidence in political leadership and the policies adopted in contexts of

crisis or catastrophe (Rojo Martínez and Soler Contreras 2020). Therefore, traditional studies on political confidence and communication should incorporate the category of social resilience to better understand the involvement and commitment of citizens (Yang 2006). In other words, not only does political communication help win elections, create an image of leadership, and spread the meaning of speeches and political messages, but it also helps increase confidence in politics and, with that, social resilience (Feldman and Zmerli 2019). Comparative papers and studies should also be performed on an international level to analyse national particularities and find global cultural patterns which would undoubtedly help to better implement public policies in the European context (Fernández-Prados *et al.* 2019; Lee and Schachter 2018).

This sociopolitical and global approach also has consequences on the way we understand resilience, traditionally focused on individual and psychological aspects, when it should be considered a social process linked to the social context (Revilla *et al.* 2017). Furthermore, as has been found, political confidence and communication can help bolster the resilient capacities of the population (Giovannini *et al.* 2020). In any event, as stated in the introduction and above in the conclusions, the concept of resilience does not revolve around one single question, a dependent variable and a description in the midst of a profound crisis, as it tends to be studied alongside other variables with which it interacts (Ramón *et al.* 2019). Without question, further theoretical work is required in future research to normatively define what will ultimately be understood as the results of social resilience in response to the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Disclosure statement

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